

**City of West St. Paul
City Council Strategic Planning Meeting Minutes
March 2, 2019**

Mayor Napier opened the meeting at 8:00 a.m. and thanked everyone for coming.

Present: Mayor Dave Napier
Councilmembers Wendy Berry, Lisa Eng-Sarne,
Anthony Fernandez, John Justen, Bob Pace and Dick Vitelli

Also Present: City Manager Ryan Schroeder
Assistant City Manager/HR Director Sherrie Le
Finance Director Char Stark
Police Chief Bud Shaver
Fire Chief Mike Pott
Assistant Fire Chief Mark Juelfs
Parks & Public Works Director/City Engineer Ross Beckwith
Community Development Director Jim Hartshorn
City Clerk Shirley Buecksler

Pamela Whitmore, LMCIT Collaboration Manager
Dan Greensweig, LMCIT Administrator
James Miller, Sr. Vice President, The Mercer Group, Inc.

Mayor Napier introduced Pamela Whitmore and Dan Greensweig from the League of Minnesota Cities.

Ms. Whitmore asked the Council what they like about West St. Paul and any questions they may have at this point.

Mayor Napier asked if it upsets the process to meet with a resident individually who wants to discuss their issue. He asked if it should be an inclusive process. Mayor Napier said he loves the small town feel of West St. Paul.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said she loves the active participation and how much people care in our community. She asked if anyone has study tips on how to best process the large amount of information received in preparation for Council meetings.

Mayor Napier said it's critical that the Council has done their work and come prepared to meetings.

Councilmember Berry said West St. Paul feels like home and we have great snow plowing.

Councilmember Pace agreed with Mayor Napier and questioned who all should be contacted on Staff, whether email or phone calls, when a resident contacts a Councilmember on an issue or with

a question. He said Staff has been fast and responsive to questions. After two years on the Council, Councilmember Pace said he is still learning and that the learning process is constantly changing.

Councilmember Fernandez said he likes a challenge and this city has a lot of things that need to be done.

Councilmember Vitelli said every day brings challenges. He said he has been on Council for about 20 years. He said he was born and raised in West St. Paul and it feels like home. Councilmember Vitelli said we have a great City Manager who makes his job as a Councilmember so easy. Councilmember Vitelli asked how we can schedule a meeting with Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan to send our message to the Legislature.

Councilmember Justen said communication with residents can be tricky, balancing questions and knowing how to respond to constituents. He said he likes that West St. Paul is beginning to feel more urban with vibrant places, especially at the north end. The shops, change in population, a city that is becoming younger, feels more like an extension of St. Paul, in a good way. He said he feels we could get a lot from partnering with St. Paul.

Ms. Whitmore provided a presentation on Roles & Responsibilities, some of which included:

Key Elements to Good Governance

- Perspective and clear roles
- Good policies/practices
- Agenda/agenda setting
- Rules of process applied equally
- Strong Staff/Council relations
- Clear public comment policy
- Know open meeting law/data practices

Tips for Difficult Conversations

- **Ask** open-ended, genuinely curious, nonjudgmental questions. Ask with curiosity. What information am I missing? What do you know that I do not?
- **Listen** to what people you disagree with say and deepen your understanding with follow-up inquiries.
- **Reflect back** their perspective by summarizing their answers and noting underlying emotions.
- **Agree before disagreeing** by naming ways in which you agree with their point of view.
- **Share your perspective.** Sometimes, less off-putting by doing so by telling a story about a personal experience.

Act as a Body

The following helps Councils act as a body:

- Clear, consistent rules of procedure
- Clear agreed upon protocols
- Planned agenda on important topics
- Same information to all members
- Respect for each other

Roles: Staff

- Educate the Council about Staff duties/roles
- Execute day-to-day operations
- Respond and communicate in a timely manner – close the information gap/loop
- Advise on specific steps to take when Council adopts policies
- Recognize the political dynamics of the job
- Remain fair and impartial
- Be open to change, growth and professional development
- Ask for priorities – and what can be given up if new things arise

During Meeting

- Listen (with curiosity) - instead of thinking how can I respond to what they are saying, actually be interested in what they are saying
- Focus on problems to be solved, not the people
 - Discuss why, not what
- Focus on interests, not positions – what is the underlying motivator
- Welcome “devil’s advocate” input
- Have integrity and respect transparency
- Put personal matters aside
- Invent options for mutual gain
 - Make opportunities to jointly think about and creatively invent new ideas that may be in the interests of both (or all)
 - Requires a time and a place to happen

Basic Team Skills

The following features are fundamental to good teamwork:

- **Trust:** Making sure you meet all commitments and maintain confidentiality when required
- **Coaching:** Using your skills, knowledge and experience to assist others or ask for help
- **Sharing Information:** To assist others to do their job
- **Flexibility:** Show a willingness to cooperate and help others when possible
- **Good Manners:** Doing small, simple things (i.e., thanking colleagues for their help)

Communication Choices

- **Aggressive** is characterized by anger, blame and insensitivity to others
- **Dominating** is bossy and puts people's backs up
- **Passive** lets others trample all over you
- **Restrained** may be inoffensive but does not fully take part in a team
- **Assertive** is the *one in the middle*, the one to aim for in communicating with people in your team

Tips for Assertiveness

- Communicates clearly and honestly
- Expects that she/he has as much right as anyone else in the team to be heard
- Can say 'no'
- Respects and listens to others
- Admits to errors without feeling she/he has lost face
- Knows she/he deserves respect
- Gives the same rights to others as she/he claims for her/himself

Listening Responsively

We, as individuals, need to know our personality type and work on how to listen. Listening is part of assertive behavior:

- **Aggressive:** Likes to talk and convince. Tip: be intentional about not talking over others or again until everyone talks.
- **Assertive:** Listens and talks appropriately.
- **Passive:** Always listens. Tip: make yourself rephrase what others are saying and then that will spur follow-up questions often from you and make you engage more.

Speak Confidently

- Team members contribute with honesty and integrity even though they disagree
- Be assertive – but consider what you say may be crucial **or** may be wrong
- 'Play the ball but not the person' – disagree with an idea not the person who thought of it
- Acknowledge other people's ideas and contributions and build on them
- Speak with enthusiasm not emotion

Team Maintenance

- Coming together is a beginning
- Working together is progress
- Staying together is a triumph

Council discussed how to make decisions together as a board, acknowledging someone who has a different perspective, and keeping everything in perspective overall.

Councilmember Justen said it's important to call people back and remember not to over-promise something you may not be able to accomplish.

Councilmember Pace said he uses his knowledge or may contact Staff for the answer, depending on their request.

Ms. Whitmore recommended that contact be made with the constituent, thanking them for their email or call, and let them know you will need to discuss with Council or Staff.

Councilmember Vitelli said he responds as politely as possible, even if he has to explain why something cannot be done.

Ms. Whitmore said talking with residents is tricky and they want to be heard but you as an individual Councilmember or Mayor cannot make decisions and promises without the rest of the Council.

Councilmember Justen said he learned not to vote at a Council meeting until citizens have spoken.

Mayor Napier said a quick response to constituents is important, even if only to let them know you are working on it and will get back to them or whom on Staff they should speak with, so they know they communicated with someone immediately.

Mr. Greensweig agreed with Mayor Napier and said his approach with getting that initial response to constituents is important.

Mayor Napier said Staff are there to carry out Council's initiatives.

In response to Councilmember Eng-Sarne's question on processing information in preparation for a Council meeting, Council discussed what works best for them individually. Ms. Whitmore said it depends on the individual how they process information best. She said she likes to look at the agenda first – some things need to be studied more closely if you're really concerned about it or feel there may be more discussion on that item. She said that sometimes it's helpful to go to the conclusion of a topic and work backwards.

Councilmember Pace said we need to trust that Staff is doing their job but there may be other things that need to be studied further before Council can take a vote.

Mayor Napier said he spends about two to three hours on Sunday studying the packet.

Mr. Greensweig said after Council has worked together for a while they will find that each member has their own strengths to bring to the table. He said they can each use their skills to come to a decision on a topic.

If Council has questions on items in the packet, Ms. Whitmore said the Charter directs Council to route questions through the City Manager. She recommended providing Staff with any questions they may bring to the table so Staff can be prepared. She said this is a best practice to make everything more efficient.

Schroeder said he has no problem with Council submitting questions directly to Department Heads, as well as Assistant Community Development Director Ben Boike, but requested that they copy him on all communication.

Ms. Whitmore said closing the loop is important for Staff to remember and to let the Mayor or Councilmember who contacted them know that they took care of the item.

Mayor Napier said it's good customer service to ensure we respond to constituents, take care of issues, and closing the loop both ways is important.

Councilmember Fernandez said he prefers not to have too many of his questions answered prior to the meeting because he believes in transparency. He added that many Cities are taping or audio recording their work sessions. He added that it may be hard for people watching at home to rationalize Council decisions when it's been worked out in the prior meeting off camera. He said so much happens behind the scenes.

Ms. Whitmore suggested letting Staff know that you're going to have questions on a topic so they can come with a folder of information in order to be more responsive for Council. She reminded Council that Staff may not have all the answers at the ready.

Mr. Greensweig said he has a board member who will call him to let him know that he has some questions on a topic and would like to dig into it a little further at the meeting. He said this is good to know that there will be a discussion to get clarity. He said it's important for the record and important for the constituents to have some level of transparency.

Ms. Whitmore said the minutes and discussion are key. She recommended giving Staff a heads up that they will have questions on a topic.

Councilmember Justen said it is sometimes unclear when there's going to be an action item on the agenda. He said he didn't realize appointments were going to be done at OCWS and thought it was going to be only a discussion on the process. He requested that items be tagged as action items somehow.

Mayor Napier said OCWS sometimes involves deep discussions and debates. Early on as a Councilmember, he said he felt the same way as Councilmember Fernandez that these work sessions should be taped but at the regular Council meeting he said he provides his thought process and concerns on contentious items so his reasons on how he voted are explained. He asked Council how they feel this should be handled as a team so everyone is comfortable with the process.

Ms. Whitmore said a lot of Cities do not have the capability to record. For those that do, she said some argue it will shut down Council debate. She said it's based on Council comfort.

Councilmember Justen said he thinks if the OCWS is not recorded beyond the minutes, it may create controversy and suspicion.

Mr. Greensweig asked if there is consensus regarding recording work sessions.

Councilmember Pace said he is not a fan of recording except for the specific reason Councilmember Justen mentioned. He said he is not comfortable explaining at the Council table why he voted a certain way.

Councilmember Fernandez said OCWS is for gathering information and should not be for decision making. He said decisions should be made at the regular Council meeting. He said recording is probably needed in our City for creating efficiency and showing how we got to a decision. He added that conference room where OCWS is held is not a large space and not comfortable for public to attend. Councilmember Fernandez said this is an important issue.

Ms. Whitmore said audio recording may be more comfortable than video recording. If residents think OCWS meetings are places for information and not for decision making, they may be upset if they weren't there for the decision. She said it needs to be clear on the agenda.

Councilmember Pace said when a developer came to OCWS, the Council discussed, asked questions and received information. Staff asked if we should proceed, Council nodded yes and the Mayor gave information at the regular Council meeting of what happened at OCWS. He said those at home may have the perception that we are making back room deals.

Ms. Whitmore said it could be discussed at OCWS but the decision itself could be held to the regular Council meeting and added to the agenda by motion.

Mr. Greensweig said it goes back to being clear in your minds and also for the public why things are done in OCWS. He said you try to make things more transparent for the public but in a reasonable amount of time. He added that work sessions are good for thinking out loud and honing down the discussion for the regular Council meeting. He said Council should let the public know that they are free to come to the OCWS but that Council is trying to get the subject down to a point that they understand it and can make a decision.

Ms. Whitmore reinforced that she would carry it through to the regular Council meeting. Have the discussion at the OCWS but carry the decision to the regular Council meeting or a motion to direct Staff to work on it.

Schroeder said from a Staff perspective, we like to air things out and be sure we have thought of everything. For example, if we thought of six items on an issue, there could be six more we didn't think of and we don't want to say that at a regular Council meeting.

Mayor Napier said when some of the trash haulers came to OCWS, they spoke up but may not have if they had been on camera. There is sensitivity in their competitiveness with each other.

Mayor Napier said he agrees with moving items to the table for a vote. He said he would like to move to no voting in OCWS, even though it is allowed for some items. Any voting or motion should be moved to the regular Council meeting, no matter what. He said we voted on an item because we were told we could but then we exposed the process and vote at the Council table. He said he would commit to making all votes at the regular Council meeting. However, he said closed sessions with developers and giving them the right to proceed further and invest more money may

be done at OCWS. He said sometimes developers don't want other developers to know about it and those situations cannot be done at the Council table.

Ms. Whitmore said the Council needs to be careful. She said there is some data that is not public so it can be closed to discuss trade secret data. She said that is a question for the City Attorney. She said they have to be recorded in a closed meeting. However, at the regular Council meeting, it could be stated that they gave Staff direction without naming the developer.

Mr. Greensweig said there are questions that Council will need to ask the City Manager or City Attorney whether they can do something. If the City Attorney says that it can be done in OCWS or take vote there, Council still needs to decide and step in as elected officials to say let's talk about it at the regular Council meeting because people will want to see and hear it.

Councilmember Justen said for the public's perspective, we need to reinforce that we are not doing anything wrong.

Ms. Whitmore asked Council if they are comfortable with the agenda and how to add topics to it.

Mayor Napier said three Councilmembers can call a special meeting. For Council items, he said a new item needs to go to the Mayor to put on the agenda. He said Councilmembers cannot add items on their own and it cannot be sent directly to the City Manager. He added that the City Manager should always be copied on the request.

Mr. Greensweig said most Cities don't have special meetings unless something comes up.

Councilmember Pace said it is usually only if there is a controversy or timeline issue.

Ms. Whitmore said the City Attorney or City Manager need to be notified of any special meeting. For special meeting agendas, she said Council has to stay on that topic and cannot go off of it.

Councilmember Fernandez said when making a special meeting request, you must name another Councilmember.

Ms. Whitmore said to get an item on the agenda, ask the Mayor but make sure Staff knows so they can get research and information together for the meeting.

Mayor Napier asked Ms. Whitmore how many Cities have the same charter format as West St. Paul. Ms. Whitmore said there are 107 charter Cities. She said if the Mayor doesn't vote, the Mayor has veto powers. It's not common, but she said there are charters where the Mayor has no vote and no veto powers. She said West St. Paul's charter is similar to State Government and the Governor, which is more common.

Ms. Whitmore asked Council if they feel that Staff treats them fairly and impartially.

Councilmember Fernandez said it's important for Councilmembers to email the City Manager if they have questions or need additional information. He said it's important to reach out before a Council meeting so Staff has the information ready. Councilmember Fernandez said we want to look prepared as a City and, by asking the smart questions, we are moving forward.

Ms. Whitmore said if you're copying the City Manager, he can choose whether everyone wants to know about it and have it available before the meeting, or knowing beforehand so research can be done. She said some have a common practice to send an email after the packet goes out to see if there are any questions or if more information is needed.

Mr. Greensweig said if constituents see fighting at a Council meeting, they have no idea what the fighting is about. By providing the City Manager with a heads up, you're doing your community a favor by having a professional discussion.

Ms. Whitmore reminded Council to keep in mind that the public will really get into the mix if there is personal stuff in a meeting. She said Council needs to focus on policy and use their vote as their voice.

Ms. Whitmore asked Council how they feel about being liaisons to other committees.

Councilmember Fernandez said his personal opinion is that there not be liaisons and said he doesn't see the point in having them.

Councilmember Pace said he agreed with Councilmember Fernandez in some respects. However, as a committee liaison, he said he could take notes on the committee's questions and bring them back to Staff, but he added that the Committee Chair could do the exact same thing. He said liaisons are able to report back to Council at OCWS. Our role as the liaison, he said, is to listen to the committee and let them do their jobs and answer any questions they may have.

Councilmember Vitelli said the committee is made up of a group of citizens. If they want Council to know something, he said they can come to Council. He doesn't think there should be liaisons.

Mayor Napier said he thinks it's an important role, if it's done right. He said they are representatives of the Council and, by them being there, it validates the work done by the committee. He said he was on both the Environmental Committee and the Parks & Recreation Committee and would have said something when he thought they were going down the wrong path but didn't say anything because it wasn't his place. He said we have had committees go off in their own tangent and the Council isn't aware. He said that's not how it's supposed to work. It's a way for the liaison to go back to Council and ask that something be added to the Council agenda so we can talk about it and provide direction to the committee.

Councilmember Vitelli said the Chair of the committee should come to the Council or the Mayor.

Mayor Napier said the validation should not be understated. He said the Environmental Commission was grateful that he spoke with knowledge and validation for the work they did on a special project. He said thank you emails came in for recognizing them at the Council table. If it's done right, Mayor Napier said it can be effective.

Councilmember Justen said what is valuable to him as a liaison is that the minutes don't capture what happens between the lines of the minutes. It's another to have someone there from Council who can talk about the underlying things in decisions and in the minutes. If we didn't have the liaison, he said it may take longer or may not be as efficient. Councilmember Justen said the Chair may not have the comfort level to go to the Mayor to put an item on the agenda. He said the Planning Commission work session are not filmed and a lot of information is shared there, so he said he thinks liaisons are a good thing.

Ms. Whitmore said the Council needs to decide whether or not they want to have liaisons. If you do, she suggested that the Council come up with some form of job description so they will see the liaison as more of a resource. She said to have a job description or purpose of the liaison will be helpful for everyone.

Mayor Napier added that the liaison is not supposed to get involved unless asked.

Councilmember Justen said the Planning Commission could use some clarification on whether the work session should be open or not.

Ms. Whitmore moved the discussion on to social media and data practice. She said the question is whether social media is public data. She said if you're presenting that page as the Mayor or as a Councilmember, it will be considered government data. Ms. Whitmore reminded everyone to be professional on social media. She said what causes her some concern is the Data Practices Office has said that there could be an open meeting law issue. If you have a Facebook page or Twitter as an elected official, Ms. Whitmore instructed not to have conversations with each other on posts or the Data Practices Office will see that as discussion. She also noted that they should not block people on Facebook or Twitter when presenting as the Mayor or Councilmember.

Ms. Whitmore said if Council uses their personal email for City work, they should keep it in a separate folder. If a data practice suit comes, she said they would only have to give that specific folder.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said people have expectations for receiving information Councilmembers may have an expectation to push information on social media. She reminded everyone to be mindful which account you're using and not to debate on the West St. Paul Neighbors Facebook page.

Ms. Whitmore said its best practice to have separate City and personal social media pages.

Mayor Napier thanked Ms. Whitmore and Mr. Greensweig for joining the meeting today.

James Miller of The Mercer Group, Inc. introduced himself and gave some information on his background. He said he worked with some of the West St. Paul Staff two years ago. He said it's good to see the changes that have been made since that time and some of the projects that were discussed at that time come to fruition. He said this Council team appears to be more effective than they were two years ago.

Mr. Miller said that the Council needs to take time to figure out what their priorities are and where they want to go. He said he hopes that at the end of the day today, Council will come away with a list of priorities for the coming year.

Mr. Miller said the goals to achieve today are:

- Identify Priorities
- Council Expectations
- Strengthen Team
- The Life Cycle of Councils

He added that when we finish today, Council will have a list of strategic priorities for 2019 and 2020. The real test, he said, will be to see how effective Council will be as a team to achieve and implement these priorities.

Mr. Miller said the Council comes together for a two-year period. He said what has been shown through the years is that it takes about six months or so for a new Council to get to know each other and build trust. At the end of the 24 month cycle, he said members will be looking at the upcoming election, running or not running again, all of which can change the dynamics of the City Council. He said this is something they need to be aware of and keep in mind.

Mr. Miller encouraged Mayor Napier to periodically take a step back and talk with the group on how they are functioning as a Council and as a team. He said this may involve Staff, as well.

Mayor Napier said the biggest thing for him is to have everyone in this room believe that they have the opportunity to voice any ideas, concerns, ambitions and initiatives taken forward. He wants everyone to feel that they can throw things out there and be honest so we can create some common visions.

Councilmember Vitelli said if we are not successful at the Legislature for Robert Street, as Council we will have to look long and hard at projects where we will have to back off. New members want to get things done but he said we will have to be willing to let things be trimmed back, though this shouldn't hinder any choices here today.

Mayor Napier said he would rather see ideas come forward, and how we get there is a whole other challenge.

Mr. Miller said the next question would be – if we don't have the resources, how do we get the resources to do it?

A. Mission/Vision/Strategic Priorities

Mr. Miller said the mission is about what somebody does. The mission statements defines what you do as a company.

A vision statement is about vision, seeing something. It's about what you want to be or become in the future and should inspire the hearts of the people.

Questions to consider:

- Who are the people and the institutions/organizations we serve as a City and why?
- Where do we want to be?
- How can we be successful in the future?

Mr. Miller said it's important to have an agreed upon vision in order to move forward towards that vision. To identify meaningful priorities, mission and vision will help us decide where we want to be. He asked if there is anything that doesn't make sense with the current mission statement. He said if it doesn't capture the mission or vision of the City, it's a discussion the Council should have in the future.

Councilmember Justen said the words "we recognize and take pride in" don't seem very visionary.

Mayor Napier said we want to be welcoming, affordable and balanced between residential and commercial. We want to create a city that welcomes everyone to want to be a part of our city. Those were important several years ago and we have made great strides. He asked how we can create that in our vision statement.

Mr. Miller said West St. Paul's vision has some real elements of what you want to see as a community. However, does it work with each priority? Does the strategic plan support the vision statement? He said this could be a topic at a work session to make sure it reflects what you, as a Council and the community, want to do as a vision for the City. He said it can change but shouldn't be something that's edited every two years, necessarily.

Mayor Napier said it's critical when we talk about taking ownership of the mission that it's important to discuss to get input now and capture those notes so we have an initial response to those.

Mr. Miller asked for ideas:

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said what's missing is accessibility, income levels, disability, and aging population. She said we are hearing a lot about sidewalks that are not accessible for those with disabilities.

Mayor Napier said the well-connected piece came from being well connected through all the different areas of our community, ages, etc.

Mr. Miller said it may help to include the word ‘accessible.’

Councilmember Berry added ‘diversity.’

Councilmember Justen said he sees property owners but not renters in the current vision statement. He said it needs to include partnership with renters, as well as homeowners and businesses.

Mr. Miller asked if there is anything irrelevant in the vision statement.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said the last sentence: ‘We strive to create’ (active voice) rather than ‘We take pride’ (past).

Councilmember Justen said he wants the list to look ambitious and forward-looking in an active voice, rather than what has been done in the past, as he reads it now.

B. Review of 2018 City Council Strategic Priorities

Mr. Miller asked the City Manager and Staff for their opinions of what occurred in 2018. He asked if there were any issues with the 2017-18 initiatives that became problematic to implement from resource to legal standpoint.

Schroeder said the difficult one experienced was in recreational programming. He said we made strides but not to the extent that he had hoped. He said he thought there would have been more collaboration.

Schroeder said we had a tough year for branding. However, at the end of the day, he said it was a good thing, though living through it has some branding difficulty. He said there was a lot of conversation outside our borders about what West St. Paul was doing now. Other than that, Schroeder said we had a pretty good year. We focused on infrastructure in 2017 and 2018, as well as now in 2019. He said one thing positive that isn’t always acknowledged is the really good partnerships we have with Dakota County. He said we probably don’t talk about it enough or thank the County enough. He said the public doesn’t differentiate between City and County costs or that we only paid 25% on certain projects.

Schroeder said to him, a recreational program is we either have it and grow it or get out of the business. He said he had hoped we could have energized some conversations with the YMCA, Inver Grove Heights, South St. Paul and others and do more with less. However, he said we never made it down the road that far. He said he tried to initiate conversations with those other parties but was disappointed that he couldn’t get something going there.

Mayor Napier said we’ve been talking for years about having a true Park and Recreation Director. As we see more and more kids in our community, he said this should be one of our initiatives and will be one of his. He would like to see a director as the number one focus for park and recreation.

Chief Shaver said sometimes we focus on things that are easy to accomplish but that he thinks we get a bigger return if we look at other things. He said people will move to a community more on motions and reputations than taxes or other things. Saying that we are 'close to it all' sounds like we are not there or that we're close to it. He suggested saying, "We're in the middle of it all." He asked how we attach ourselves to that so people will see that and see West St. Paul in the same light and create some enthusiasm to come here. He said there are a lot of young families coming here but we don't necessarily promote that or get that message out. He said we also focus on what our residents are saying and not on what those are saying outside of West St. Paul.

Assistant City Manager Le said she thinks we do a lot of collaborations with other Cities, as well as the County, and we have really grown our Yellow Ribbon program. She said we are looking at picking up other Cities to join us. She said it's because we have had other growths and successes, such as our recycling program between four Cities. Le said that Mayors and City Managers in other Cities said they love to work with West St. Paul. She said we are now being recognized by the State Beyond the Yellow Ribbon for what we have been doing here.

Le said what didn't go well last year is that we tried to do an outreach program to persons of color and immigrants to build trust in those communities but, though we thought our efforts were going in a good direction, it got shut down. She said we need to figure out how we want to do this and how it should be made up so we can get some involvement from those communities with whom we are trying to build a relationship. Mr. Miller said that this ties back to inclusion.

Finance Director Stark said this city is very family-oriented, work with each other and keep each other informed. She said we have great teamwork here. She added that her daughter is looking to buy her first home and is looking at West St. Paul because it's affordable, has many activities, families moving in, trail systems, and more.

Financially, Stark said we worked hard this year to put together financial plans, understanding how we got here, put the CIP/CEP plan together to be a more inclusive document, and can now add new ideas to it.

City Engineer Beckwith said with the County being a partner, it's not hard to ask them when they're going to do a project. He said they are great partners and lets them know they're appreciated. He said infrastructure is big for 2019 and we will be doing a lot in just one year. He said he likes that the momentum has carried through from 2017-18.

Community Development Director Hartshorn said it's not just infrastructure. He said he was able to negotiate market values with the County Assessor's Office and was able to change SAC (Sewer Access Charges) with the Met Council. He agreed that the County has been great to work with. Hartshorn said we have had more developers interested in this area in the last couple of years. He said he can see housing maintenance being a big part of the future. He said there is a lot of success with housing in West St. Paul but that maintenance will always be an issue.

Mayor Napier said, in talking about 2019 projects, it's an important message to send to the community that we are going to be able to stabilize taxes coming forward. He said these real expectations will be laid out eventually.

C. Report on Neighborhood Meeting Data

Schroeder said Council received the Neighborhood Meeting results and minutes yesterday. He said he was surprised and thought that the tax piece was going to sky rocket, relative to past years. He said it's up a little bit with some of the conversation about taxes but the survey results didn't show that as an ongoing concern. He said when you add in the County and School District and look at all the taxing jurisdictions, we are right down the middle. Schroeder said West St. Paul's tax rate is twice that of other large cities in Dakota County. In the survey data, he said neighborhood livability continues to be the same concern, and trails and sidewalks seem to be higher priority than some other things. He said he wishes this was statistically significant but it's not. He said those who were in the room may not reflect the other 21,000 residents.

Councilmember Vitelli said there was a suggestion for daytime and Saturday meetings and perhaps we could look at that.

Councilmember Pace said he agreed with Schroeder and some of the same people came to all three meetings. For a city of this size, he said the numbers were low. He said about 75% of the people in the community don't want to get involved. He agreed with Councilmember Vitelli on daytime and Saturday meetings, as well as putting surveys in the mail to every resident and conducting surveys at the West St. Paul Days event. He questioned how we can get our residents to actually tell us what they like or what they want.

Mr. Miller said it is incredibly difficult and not unique to West St. Paul. He said you can do everything you can to let people know about road construction but they still don't know about it. He said the city is an important part of Staff and Council's life but it's not that important to everyone who lives in West St. Paul. He said we may need to expand and find other ways to get community input.

Chief Shaver said, instead of asking people to come to us, we need to go to them but it can't be just one time. He said it should be done throughout the year. Community events, go to churches, grab some burgers and go down to East Marie, grill burgers, have tablets out, bilingual staff, we could get different results.

Councilmember Vitelli said poor participation or low numbers could also be an indicator that we are doing things right. He said the Police Department has an excellent reputation. Public Works are dependable. Police are community-driven and community-orientated. He said that travels through the community and they see the great service we have in Public Works, Police and Fire. He said he thinks we are doing a lot of things right.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said meetings and online results were good, very good and excellent. She said 'good' is still above and beyond. Getting 90% good and above is great. She agreed with Chief Shaver on having a booth for surveys at events.

Mayor Napier said the people giving responses of good, very good and excellent are those who are involved in the community. He said St. Stephen's Church has a daycare area where we could have teenage kids watch the little kids during meetings. He said people with families may be more willing to attend if there was daycare.

Councilmember Justen said the one problem with participation is all of the handouts and the survey were only in English. He said if someone came that didn't speak English, that they would leave. He said it's asking a lot of them to participate. He said there are significant populations who cannot attend in person but who also cannot do the online survey either. He said this is a big concern for him and that we may see some very different priorities form that community.

Councilmember Vitelli said his grandparents were immigrants from Italy, with nine children and they had to learn to speak English. He said we can't put every language on our website.

Councilmember Justen said his business sees customers come in with their teenage children to interpret for them.

Chief Shaver said it costs a lot to translate.

Councilmember Justen said at least the online component could be translated.

Mayor Napier said he translated his campaign brochure and it's a lot tougher than you think and sometimes it's not accurate. He said it is a challenge but should be one of our initiatives moving forward. He said the question is how we get there. He added that there may be grant funding available.

Councilmember Vitelli said we could check with the School District.

Councilmember Berry said we could find volunteers who are passionate about diversity.

Le said the resident who spoke at the meeting about translation provided her with her card.

Mr. Miller said some Cities have tried to be more sensitive to where they get the information, such as the rotary, churches, going to where people are rather than asking them to come to you. He agreed with Councilmember Vitelli and said if things weren't going well, there would have been higher participation. However, he said you can't over rely on what you're receiving with low participation.

D. Small Group Discussion

Mr. Miller asked if there are any priorities that should be carried over for the coming year and if there are any issues that the City dealt with that weren't reflected in those initiatives.

Mayor Napier said starting with the new Council, he has sent the message that it's very important to have eyes focused. He said everyone has moved forward and is looking ahead to what we can do and bring new energy to the Council. He said there wasn't any reflection on the past at the Neighborhood Meetings.

Schroeder said related to Council initiatives, what we did work on that doesn't show up here is that we spent a lot of effort trying to find funds, as well as a lot of time on fiscal policies and looking differently on how we structure the finances of the City. Hundreds of hours that did not show up here. He said the next time around it has to show up somewhere.

Councilmember Vitelli said he thinks we function very well as a City because of Staff. He said there must be good relationships between people because he doesn't see any unresolvable issues. He said he loves our Police and Fire Staff. With our aging population and the number of fire runs our Fire Department does, it's necessary that we have a full time Staff.

Mayor Napier said working with Council and Department Heads, it was made clear that everyone feels comfortable talking and asking questions. He said it is great to have Staff at the table with us to work through this process. He said he appreciated having Staff at the Neighborhood Meetings and for Chief Shaver getting residents involved.

Suggestions for future Neighborhood Meetings included daycare, an online survey, a video of the meeting, along with perhaps a way for them to respond to the video, and a blog for feedback.

Le said she can talk with Marketing & Communications Manager Dan Nowicki for ways to allow residents to respond to it.

Assistant Fire Chief Juelfs asked if Facebook Live was considered. He said the younger generation watch meetings on Facebook Live and Nowicki could assist with that.

Councilmember Justen said one thing that wasn't in the online survey was a place for them to submit a question they would like to ask. He said there are so many participants in the online survey but we could ask what they would like to bring up to Council or what they would have asked at the Neighborhood Meeting, if they had been able to attend.

Mayor Napier said he was surprised at some of the aggressive approaches at the February 26 Neighborhood Meeting. And even though there wasn't a large turnout, he said it was fun to watch Chief Shaver get people out of their comfort zone.

Council and Staff broke into three small groups for further discussion on Council initiatives and priorities for 2019-20.

Council Initiatives for 2019 – Small Group Discussion

| | GROUP 1 (in order of priority) | GROUP 2 (not in order of priority) | GROUP 3 (not in order of priority) |
|---|--|--|---|
| 1 | Signal Hills Town Center 1 YMCA Community Center Golf Course | Ped Plan Publish That is a Priority | Continue with Rebranding |
| 2 | Trails & Sidewalk | Diversity Outreach | Invest in Infrastructure |
| 3 | Financial Awareness | Debt Reduction | Recreational Opportunities for All Ages and Abilities |
| 4 | Affordable Housing | Housing, Retail, Industrial | Plan to Improve and Maintain Parks |
| 5 | Partnering with Surrounding Cities/County | Collaboratives | Improving Housing Stock |
| 6 | Maintain Park Systems | | Identify Top Priorities Regarding Diversity and Inclusion, Outreach |
| 7 | | | Actively Pursue all Resources to Facilitate Council Initiatives in Recognition of Current Fiscal Restraints |
| 8 | | | Create Active Plan to Deal with Vacant Properties and Eyesores. Think Creatively and Constructively to Rejuvenate (i.e., Lowertown St. Paul) |
| 9 | | | Improve Accessibility Regarding Walking, Biking, Wheelchair, Bus Routes |

Chief Shaver asked how much control the City has over private property.

Councilmember Justen said it looks like all three groups were working with the understanding that resources are limited.

Mayor Napier said one thing he didn't put up but that is a priority is that our Police Department does not have the ability to have a vehicle in a garage as evidence, along with an investigative interview room. He said he held back because we don't have the resources.

Chief Shaver said it's not only the Police Department. He said Engineering recently lost one person, Finance is at minimal staff, and more and more demands are being made on Staff. He said the Police Department doesn't have a place for Officers to change clothes.

Councilmember Fernandez said public safety is one of our largest expenses and asked how Council can help the Police Department reduce that number. He asked what actions we can take as a City to help with that problem.

Chief Shaver said he looks at it from a citywide perspective. Over the years, he said we have been tightening our belt as things occur in our community. He said Council is already doing some things to help, such as rental density and ordinances that have been implemented. He said the lowest rent in the metro area is going against us, however, and that it attracts a certain clientele that puts demands on our resources. He said 40% of calls are for mental health calls.

Councilmember Fernandez asked if these calls are from County-sponsored housing.

Chief Shaver said looking at the visionary items, we forgot about the basics. He said if we don't start moving forward, we are going to fall behind and there is no clear answer for Council.

Mayor Napier said we have listened and addressed and tightened up the rental license ordinance, cracked down on selling alcohol to underage drinkers, cameras on some of our facilities, and trying to create a less attractive place to commit crimes. He said we create ordinances to encourage good strong community ethics but we still need to have the resources within each department in order to do their job.

Councilmember Fernandez said he wants to be proactive, not reactive.

Chief Shaver said there is a growing population in our community that will consume more and more services.

Councilmember Fernandez asked what we can do as a City to address this.

Mayor Napier said if we listen to what the Police Department is saying and take control of it, this will make their lives easier.

Councilmember Fernandez said he wants to be sure both the County and State aren't disproportionately placing people with issues in this city. At some point it becomes a breaking point and we have to be able to identify that and tell our Senator and House Representatives that we are suffering because of it. He said we want and need to hear that. He said we are at a potentially breaking point.

Chief Shaver said we are trying to be creative with how we deal with them. Adding an Officer or an employee to something doesn't always accomplish it. He said when we got an Officer to investigate financial crime it worked great. Perhaps that could be applied in our process here.

Mr. Miller asked if anything is missing from the list of initiatives.

Mayor Napier said to add to infrastructure conversation. He said we've seen the negative effects that could be long-term when we fail to keep up with infrastructure. He said some streets and facilities are declining. Mayor Napier said we're not caught up yet and we can't lose focus on improving infrastructure. He said when we get behind it's a huge struggle.

Councilmember Fernandez said we are at the same point with our housing stock. He said we can start to look at creative ways for residents to make improvements to their properties. Unless we have a strong revitalization of housing, he said they're going to deteriorate. He said everyone is worried about deteriorating housing stock because people see it on a daily basis when they drive through town. He said it's important to look at that critically and we need to all be behind it. Councilmember Fernandez said if we don't address this that in ten to 20 years our housing stock will look even worse.

Councilmember Fernandez said we need to develop a way to get people actively participating in revitalization of our community.

Mayor Napier said we have aging apartment buildings and some landlords don't put money back into their properties but still get decent rent. He said we need our landlords to upgrade their properties. He said how we inspire them will increase their rent.

Mayor Napier said that, internally, we just need to be sure we are taking care of things before they're failing and Staff informing us of such. If Staff knows it's important to Council to take care of what we have before we start something else, we need to take care of our current infrastructure. He said Staff has been doing well at this for the past several years.

Chief Shaver said Council is put in a tough position because you want to apply more resources but something else costs more.

Mayor Napier said he has no problem telling a resident we are holding off on something because we have pails of catching water at City Hall. He said we need to know about issues and stay on top of them.

Chief Shaver said Council may need an assessment on how it lays out when infrastructure needs to be repaired or replaced.

Mayor Napier said this conversation tells the real picture and real story. He said it still excites him to set that vision and said we can get there.

Chief Shaver said all the development Community Development Director Hartshorn has brought to town is exciting.

Councilmember Fernandez said Beckwith mentioned the good relationship he has with the County. He said the large piece of land on Annapolis has been vacant for way too long. He said Dakota County Community Development Agency (CDA) should see and be aware of what's going on.

Councilmember Fernandez said people want to work with communities that have a plan. He said the CDA needs to listen and we are taking on a lot and need some help.

Mayor Napier said our north gateway is sitting empty.

Councilmember Justen said some of these initiatives are resource cost and some is not. He said communication is time but not cost and there's a difference between maintaining parks and improving parks. He said there's urgency, importance and resource costs, all of which will change the order of priority.

Mayor Napier said we are currently improving housing stock and doesn't cost us any additional money.

Councilmember Justen said everyone including residents put the top priority as walkability, biking and trails, though it will cost the most in resources.

Mayor Napier said we can do sidewalks at no cost to the City if we assess at 100%.

Councilmember Justen said one of the things we've talked about is assessing. He said he thinks it's terrible to assess residents at 100%. He said we need to be realistic and find a balance.

Mr. Miller asked if there needs to be a separate item to expand infrastructure.

Le asked if Council feels we have appropriate staffing.

Beckwith said thousands of plants were added to Robert Street with no additional staff. He said millions of dollars have gone into parks but it costs money to keep them beautiful. He said we are not even maintaining what we have.

A question was raised if initiative number four should be changed to "plan to maintain parks."

Mayor Napier said he talked to Representative Hansen about lottery money to help improve plant restoration in our parks. He said we would do it if we got the resources from the grant, so that's why "improve" should stay in initiative number four.

Schroeder said staffing should not be a goal but accomplishing the Council's goal is the goal.

Schroeder said what Councilmember Fernandez was saying is, if 40% of Police calls are mental health calls, how do we reduce that number? Councilmember Pace agreed.

Mayor Napier said a strong community has strong recreational programs and that is what strengthens our community. Councilmember Pace agreed.

Council came to agreement on the list of initiatives and suggested that Staff wordsmith the list and bring to Council for vote and then roll it out to the community.

Mayor Napier said he would like to see everything listed today on one document as Group 1, 2 and 3. He would like to see this list for comparison so we are sure what each group discussed is represented in the final list, which can then be prepared for Council approval.

Councilmember Eng-Sarne said the list is not in order of importance but that perhaps it should be when it's published.

Mayor Napier said he would prefer they not be in priority order.

Councilmember Justen said the first item may need to be the most important and essential item, since people will think the top one is the most important.

Councilmember Vitelli suggested a circle with the center including the words, "Goals of the West St. Paul City Council," and the initiatives all around the circle so it shows no priority.

Chief Shaver asked what was meant by improving housing stock and rebranding. What are you looking for? What are you hoping will benefit the City in the long-term so Staff can work at accomplishing those specifics?

Mayor Napier said he would look to have some quarterly initiatives where every three to four months Staff would come back to Council with information on where we are at and what they need help from Council with to keep going, as well as a mid-year report. He said this will allow Council the opportunity to get where we need to be. Mayor Napier said some items may be small but the report will show we accomplished some of the intent behind them.

Councilmember Pace said at OCWS once a month, Council can look at the list and let Staff know what items they would like to see them working on and provide direction.

Mr. Miller said Council should verify that the list of initiatives captures what was discussed, along with expectations for these initiatives. He said some objectives for achievement should be listed under each one. He said you should congratulate yourselves because you made them and think about why you couldn't make others, and what other resources you need.

Mayor Napier said we need to dedicate some future OCWS time to get this off the ground.

Councilmember Fernandez said another way to look at it is there are some things that can be checked off by the Public Safety group. There are a couple of things that can be done by that group. He said we can get some things done and report back to full Council so it's not taking up a lot of Council time. Councilmember Fernandez said he will send a list of ideas on how to do this to the Mayor.

Councilmember Fernandez said we have a great group collecting data, including Laura Vaughan and Jesse Mettner. He said it doesn't feel like, as a city, that we are up to speed with the Police Department and that we need better data sharing. He said we want to stay ahead of trends that are starting in the Police Department before we have to take stronger action. When we have the ability to do that and have that data and a better working relationship, he said this is what he envisions this group to be. Then we're not using up all the OCWS time.

Chief Shaver agreed that our committees could think these through and develop things to allow Council to have a dashboard view of them, with warnings on what may need immediate action.

Councilmember Fernandez said it would be really nice to have what Chief Shaver described so Council can see it and relate this information to the people we are trying to build relationships with and to our constituents so we are seeing the full picture.

Council and Staff discussed the results of the three groups and refined those results into one list of initiatives for 2019-2020:

| | COUNCIL INITIATIVE (not in order of priority) |
|---|--|
| 1 | Continue with Rebranding/Communication |
| 2 | Invest in Infrastructure and Public Facilities |
| 3 | Recreational Opportunities for All Ages and Abilities |
| 4 | Plan to Improve and Maintain Parks |
| 5 | Improving Housing Stock |
| 6 | Identify Top Priorities Regarding Diversity and Inclusion Outreach |
| 7 | Actively Pursue All Resources to Facilitate Council Initiatives in Recognition of Current Fiscal Restraints |
| 8 | Create Active Plan to Deal with Vacant Properties and Eyesores. Think Creatively and Constructively to Rejuvenate |
| 9 | Improve Accessibility Regarding Walking, Biking, Wheelchairs, Bike Routes |

Schroeder said he assumes that Mr. Miller will provide a compendium for us.

Councilmember Fernandez asked if there are things that we need to look at as a Council to pump the breaks on any projects that might have to be cut.

Schroeder said yes, that he and Mayor Napier have discussed this. Schroeder said we need to reverse the upward trend of debt. He said we need to make sure the debt we issue is below the principal of the payment in order to reverse that trend. He said it doesn't relate directly to how much we're spending, but we just can't continue to issue debt beyond our capacity to handle it. Schroeder said if we get anything from the State, sales tax of LGA, that's significant from an ability to give us some relief. He said our intent is to come back soon with some rework of the comp plan - 'wants' and 'needs' and, at the moment, we think most park improvements fall under the 'wants' category and pipe falls under 'need.'

Mayor Napier said we are sitting pretty for 2019. He said it will be productive from everything that is already in the works and, even if we don't add anything else, it will be a great year to look at financial initiatives.

Councilmember Fernandez asked when the Marie trail will be done. Schroeder said they will start in June and finish by fall. Councilmember Fernandez said we should hold a ground-breaking and make it an event.

Mayor Napier thanked Mr. Miller for his assistance at today's Strategic Planning Meeting. He said it was an awesome meeting with great ideas by a great group. Mayor Napier thanked everyone for being here and talking openly.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 p.m.

Shirley R Buecksler
City Clerk